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PP RUEHQU
DE RUEHPU #0315 0451824
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 141824Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2365
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0969
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0815
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0258
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0404
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0839

UNCLAS PORT AU PRINCE 000315

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR
DRL
S/CRS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)
TREASURY FOR JEFFREY LEVINE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS: WHY UNDERVOTES COUNT, WHY THE NDI
QUICK COUNT IS WRONG

¶1. Article 185 of the Haitian electoral law, created by Presidential decree on February 11, 2005 in consultation with the international community, stipulates that any ballot that is either properly filled out or left blank must be counted as a vote once placed in a ballot box. This stipulation recognizes the right of a voter to vote for "none of the above." In addition, "any ballot on which the Voting Bureau cannot recognize the intention or political will of the voter shall be declared null."

¶2. As such, the over 85,000 ballots placed in ballot boxes with no vote for President must be counted as part of the tally. Blank votes made up approximately 4.67 percent of the national vote. If these votes were discounted, front-runner Rene Preval would have 51.15 percent of the national vote and would win the first round. While only 2.79 percent of ballots in the West department were counted as "blank", totals were higher in the provinces, ranging from 4.27 percent in the Northwest to 9.10 percent in the Central Plateau. A likely or at least plausible explanation for this is that voters in the provinces tend to be less educated than those in Port-au-Prince.

NDI Quick Count Did Not Count Under-votes

¶3. NDI admitted on February 14 that their quick count conducted on February 7 did not include under-votes. As such, their results predicted a winning margin for Preval of 54 percent. At a press conference on February 14, Preval cited the discrepancy between the published CEP result of 49 percent and the NDI quick count as evidence of what he termed the "massive fraud" which has deprived him of a first round victory.

Role of the Blank Ballot

¶4. NOTE: The disputed legislative elections in 2000 hinged upon the question of whether under-votes should have been counted as part of the total vote count. Fanmi Lavalas and the Aristide government claimed they should not, while the political opposition and international observers insisted that they should, leading to the contestation of several Senate seats. This dispute set in motion the eventual fall of the Aristide government. END NOTE.

